

Joint statements of Deputy Prime Minister Venizelos and Albanian Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati following their meeting in Tirana (21 February 2014)

D. BUSHATI: Good day, everyone. I had the satisfaction of receiving the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister today, in his capacity as President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union, in the context of his tour of the region. I would like to thank Mr. Venizelos for Greece's clear approach to and focus of attention on the Balkan region and the European perspective of all its countries, which has been clear throughout his tour, in the positive messages he conveyed; messages that look to the European future of our whole region.

I assured Foreign Minister Venizelos that Albania will move ahead with the necessary steps and reforms, crowning with success the efforts aimed at our gaining candidate-country status, and we will continue resolutely on our European course, the ultimate goal of which is the country's full accession to the EU.

I also appreciated the Greek government's very positive efforts to impart fresh momentum to the Thessaloniki Agenda of 2003, as a clear indication of the will of Greece and the EU to welcome our whole region into the EU.

As is well known, our two countries have strategic cooperation that has been reaffirmed by the heads of the highest institutions of the Albanian and Greek states. We have traveled a long road together, as neighbouring nations, sharing moments of joy as well as hardships. On the other hand, however, there are certain issues that have yet to be resolved.

Together with Mr. Venizelos, in the meetings we have had over this time, we designated the issues that need to be put on track for resolution, and naturally we found the common language, so that international law and the European perspective can be clear points of reference, not just for resolving these few issues, but also for further strengthening the relations between our two countries and our two peoples.

In this context, allow me, first, to announce publicly that we found the common language, in principle, for the settlement of the place-name issue; an issue of a clearly technical nature; an issue that concerns us and will move towards resolution in line with the international standards implemented in this sector, thus respecting international law, the territorial integrity of the two countries, the principles of good neighbourly relations, and, naturally, serving the citizens who will enjoy the benefits of understanding between the two governments; understanding that, on a technical level, will be manifested in a clearer and more detailed agreement.

Second, I have the satisfaction of announcing publicly that we agreed with the Greek government to activate certain committees deriving from the Friendship Agreement that regulates issues between our two countries; issues that were inherited or have to do with current developments, and that will be discussed and dealt with by the

corresponding committees, in a spirit of understanding, mutuality and, naturally, in the framework of the two countries' Euroatlantic perspective.

Third, we also decided, on a bilateral level, to continue the process of high-level consultations and discussions, which will not be limited to the level of Summit Meetings, which have lately been intensified. A consultation process that we believe will lead to the full resolution of issues that have not yet been dealt with as they should.

I would like once again to thank Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos for the exchange of views and for the fact that, throughout this time, we have been in ongoing contact, serving to enhance the relations between our two countries.

Allow me also to wish Greece success in the EU Presidency and in passing as fruitful a baton as possible to our other neighbouring country, Italy, bearing in mind that we are also in the Mediterranean year: A Mediterranean year in which Albania, as an intrinsic part of this region, has great aspirations for lending its assistance.

Thank you.

E. VENIZELOS: I want to thank my dear colleague and friend Mr. Bushati for the warm welcome, his good wishes, and the extremely productive spirit expressed in his statements. The talks we had between the two delegations, the talks we had one on one, as well as the discussion I had yesterday with Prime Minister Rama, which was extremely friendly, specific and practical, culminate in very specific conclusions.

As my colleague Mr. Bushati said, I am here in two capacities: First, as the Presidency, this semester, of the Council of Ministers of the EU, and, second, naturally, in my national capacity as Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.

I briefed Prime Minister Rama and Foreign Minister Bushati today on the results so far of the Hellenic Presidency of the EU and on the results of my meetings in the six capitals of the Western Balkans. I am pleased that my trip comes to completion here in Albania, in Tirana, and this is my second visit here within a few months. I want to express my pleasure again at having received Mr. Bushati in Athens a few days ago, within the framework of the 16th Ministerial Meeting of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, which Albania is currently chairing. Thus, we had the opportunity to talk twice, within the space of a few days, about our common European goals and our bilateral issues.

It is a main priority of the Hellenic Presidency that candidate-country status be granted to Albania by the end of the six months of the Hellenic Presidency. On a national level, Greece came out in favor of granting candidate-country status to Albania this past December.

Greece and Albania are determined to work together to achieve this goal. Albania is already a member of NATO, and the European perspective is something that interests

us very much as an element of stability and perspective for the Western Balkans. And it is also a matter that is interwoven with the partnership linking Greece with Albania.

I am pleased because we will have the opportunity, at the end of April, to meet in Thessaloniki for a major Ministerial Conference – the Foreign Ministers of the 28 EU member states and of the six states of the Western Balkans – so that we can point up and revitalize the Thessaloniki Agenda, which was the main priority of our previous Presidency of the EU, in 2003, aimed at the European integration of all the Western Balkan states.

On a bilateral level, there really are some issues, but, as Mr. Bushati said earlier, we have made substantial and practical preparations that allow us to move quickly, providing definitive and comprehensive solutions for all the pending issues, based on respect for international law, as well as on respect for good neighbourly relations, which are also a very important aspect of international law and the Community acquis.

Within this framework, we will work in a speedy and professional manner, making optimum use of the existing Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourliness. We will activate joint committees in sectors that have great development and political interest. Of course, we will solve the problems that interest the people and their potential for free movement.

I noted with satisfaction the statement made by my colleague Mr. Bushati: that on issues like place-names, there is no dimension of a political nature, no bias. There is always full respect for territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations. So we already have a solid political foundation for moving ahead and resolving technical problems based on international political practices. Of course, it is international law that will give us a comprehensive, quick and practicable solution for all the issues that involve our countries' being land and sea neighbours.

We are two member states of NATO, allies and friends. We are two countries that are linked by a partnership. We offer our friendly good offices for Albania's accession to the EU. On this firm foundation, we are resolving all the issues and following the principles and rules of European legal and political culture.

With these thoughts, I thank Mr. Bushati for his good wishes, and I want to assure him that we will hand on to the Italian Presidency the best and richest results of the six months of the Hellenic Presidency.